

# THE LONE WOLF



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## CHAPTER X.

## Disaster.

Having fulfilled his purpose of making himself acquainted with the individuals composing the opposition, Lanyard shut the door in their faces, thrust his hands in his pockets, and sauntered downstairs, chuckling, his nose in the air, on the best of terms with himself.

True, the fat was in the fire and well ablaze—he had to look to himself now and go warily in the shadow of their enmity. But it was something to have faced down those four, if he wasn't seriously impressed by any one of them.

Popinot, perhaps, was the most dangerous, a vindictive animal, and the creature he controlled a murderous lot—drug-ridden, drink-bedecked, vicious little rats of Belleville, who'd knife a man for the price of an abstinence. But Popinot wouldn't move without leave from De Morbihan, and unless Lanyard's calculations were seriously miscast, De Morbihan would restrain both himself and his associates until thoroughly convinced Lanyard was impregnable against every form of evasion.

Murder was something a bit out of De Morbihan's line—something which, at least, he could be counted on to hold in reserve. And by the time he was ready to employ it, Lanyard would be well beyond his reach. Wertheimer, too, would deprecate violence until all else had failed; his half-caste type was cowardly, and cowardly kills only impulsively, before they've had time to weigh the consequences. There remained "Smith"—enigma; a man apparently gifted with both intelligence and character. But if so, what the deuce was he doing in such company?

Lanyard's place at the table of chemin de fer had been filled by another, and, too impatient to await a vacancy, he wandered on to the salon dedicated to roulette, tested his luck by staking a note of 500 francs on the black, won, and inconspicuously subsided into a chair and oblivion for the space of three-quarters of an hour.

At the end of that period he found himself minus his heavy winnings at chemin de fer and the ten thousand francs of his reserve fund as well. By way of a lining to his pockets there remained precisely the sum which he had brought into Paris that same evening, less subsequent general expenses.

The experience was no novelty in his history. He rose, less resentful than regretful that his ill luck obliged him to quit just when play was growing most interesting, and resignedly sought the cloakroom.

And there he found De Morbihan—again—standing all garmented for the street, mouthing a huge cigar and wearing a look of impatient discontent.

"At last!" he cried in an aggrieved tone as Lanyard appeared. "You do take your time, my friend!"

Lanyard smiled with a smile whatever emotion was his.

"I don't suppose you really meant to wait for me," he parried, with double meaning, both to humor De Morbihan and hoodwink the attendant.

"What do you think?" retorted the count with asperity—"that I'm willing to stand by and let you moon around Paris at this hour of the morning, hunting for a taxicab that isn't there and running God knows what risk of being stuck up by some misbegotten Apache? But I should say not! I mean to take you home in my car, though it cost me a half-hour of beauty sleep not lightly to be forfeited at my age!"

The significance that underlay the semihumorous petulance of the little man was not wasted.

"You're most amiable, M. le Comte!" Lanyard said thoughtfully, while the attendant produced his hat and coat.

"But now, if you're ready, I won't delay you longer."

In another moment they were outside the clubhouse, its doors closed behind them, while before them, waiting at the curb, was that same handsome black limousine which had brought the adventurer from L'Abbaye.

Two swift glances, right and left, showed him an empty street, destitute of hint of danger.

"One moment, monsieur!" he said, detaching the count with a touch on his sleeve. "It's only right that I should advise you. I'm armed."

"Then you're less foolhardy than one feared. If such things interest you, I don't mind admitting I carry a life-preserver of my own. But what of that? Is one eager to go shooting, at this time of night, for the sheer fun of explaining to the police that one has been attacked by Apaches? Providing one lived to explain!"

"It's as bad as that, eh?"

"Enough to make me loath to linger at your side in a tight doorway!" Lanyard laughed in his own discomfort.

"M. le Comte," said he, "there's a dash in you of what our American confrere, Mysterious Smith, would call sporting blood that commands my unstinted admiration. I thank you for your offered courtesy, and beg leave to accept."

De Morbihan replied with a grunt of none too civil intonation, instructed the chauffeur "To Troyon's," and followed Lanyard into the car.

"Courtesy!" he repeated, settling

himself with a shako. "That makes nothing. If I regarded my own inclinations, I'd let you go to the devil as quick as Popinot's assassins could send you there!"

"This is delightful!" Lanyard protested. "First you must see me home, to save my life and then you tell me your inclinations consign me to a premature grave. Is there any explanation, possibly?"

"On your person," replied the count briefly.

"Eh?"

"You carry your reason with you, my friend—in the shape of the Omber loot."

"Assuming that you are right—"

"You never went to the Rue du Bac, monsieur, without those jewels, and I have had you under observation ever since."

"What conceivable interest," Lanyard pursued evenly, "do you fancy you've got in the said loot?"

"Enough, at least, to render me unwilling to kiss it adieu by leaving you to the mercies of Popinot. You don't imagine I'd ever hear of it again when his Apaches had finished with you?"

"Ah! So, after all, your self-styled organization isn't founded on that reciprocal trust so essential to the success of such enterprises?"

"Make what you will of your inferences, my friend," the count returned, unruffled; "but don't forget my advice: pull wide of Popinot!"

"A vindictive soul, eh?"

"One may say that."

"And you can't hold him?"

"That one? No fear! You were anything but wise to bait him as you did."

"Perhaps. It's purely a matter of taste in associates."

"If I were the fool you think me," rejoined the count, "I'd resent that intimation. As it happens, I'm not. At least, I can wait before calling you to account."

"And, meantime, profit by your patience?"

"Naturally. Haven't I said as much?"

"Still I'm perplexed. I can't imagine how you reckon to declare your self in on the Omber loot?"

"That will transpire. If you were wise you'd hand the stuff over to me here and now and accept what I choose to give you in return. But inasmuch as you're the least wise of men, you will have your lesson."

"Meaning—"

"The night brings counsel—you'll have time to think things over. By tomorrow you'll be coming to find me and give me those jewels, without reservation, in exchange for what influence I have in certain quarters."

"With your famous friend, the chief of the surete, eh?"

"Possibly. I am known also at La Tour Pointure."

"I confess I don't follow you, unless you mean to lay an information against me."

"Never that."

"It's a riddle, then?"

"For the moment only. But I will say this: it will be futile, your attempting to escape Paris; Popinot has already picketed every outlet. Your one hope resides in me; and I shall be at home to you until midnight tomorrow—today, rather."

Impressed in spite of himself, Lanyard stared. But the count maintained an imperturbable manner, looking straight ahead. Such calm assurance could hardly be sheer bluff.

"I must think this over," Lanyard muttered.

"Pray don't let me hinder you," the count begged with mild irony. "I have my futile thoughts as well."

Lanyard laughed quietly and subsided into a reverie which, undisturbed by De Morbihan, endured throughout the brief remainder of their drive; for, thanks to the smallness of the hour, the streets were practically deserted and offered no hindrance to speed, while the chauffeur was doubtless eager for his bed.

As they drew near Troyon's, however, Lanyard sat up and jealously reconnoitered both sides of the way.

"Surely you don't expect to be kept out?" the count asked dryly. "But that just shows how little you appreciate our good Popinot. He'll never offer any objection to your locking yourself up where he knows he can find you—but only to your leaving without permission!"

"Something in that, perhaps. Still, I always give myself the benefit of every doubt."

"There was, indeed, no sign of ambush that he could detect in any quarter—no indication that Popinot's Apaches were skulking about. None the less, Lanyard produced his automatic and freed the safety catch before opening the door."

"A thousand thanks, my dear count!"

"For what? Doing myself a service? You make me ashamed!"

"I know," agreed Lanyard, deprecatingly; "but that's the way I am—a little devil—you really can't trust me! Adieu, M. le Comte."

"Au revoir, monsieur!"

Lanyard watched the car round the corner before turning to the entrance of Troyon's, simultaneously keeping his weather eye bright. But when the motor was gone the street seemed quite deserted and as soundless as though it had been the thoroughfare of some remote village rather than an

artery of the pulsing old heart of Paris.

Yet he wasn't satisfied. He even shivered a bit, perhaps because of the chill in that air of early morning, possibly because a shadow of premonition had fallen athwart his soul.

Whatever its cause, he could find no excuse for the sensation, and shaking himself impatiently, pressed the button that rang a bell by the ear of the concierge, heard the latch click, thrust the door wide, and re-entered Troyon's.

Here reigned a silence even more marked than that of the street, a silence as heavy and profound as the grave's, so that sheer instinct prompted Lanyard to tread lightly as he made his way down the passage and across the courtyard toward the stairway; and in that hush the creak of a graceless hinge, when the concierge opened the door of his quarters to assure himself of the identity of this belated guest, seemed little less than downright profanity.

Lanyard paused and delved into his pockets, nodding genially to the bloated, sleepy old face beneath the guardian's nightcap.

"Sorry to disturb you, monsieur," he said politely, further impoverishing himself in the sum of five francs in witness to the sincerity of his regrets.

"I thank monsieur; but what need to consider me? It's my duty. And what is one interruption more or less? All night they come and go."

"Good night, monsieur," Lanyard cut short the old man's garrulity, and went on up the stairs, now a little wearily, of a sudden newly conscious of his enervating fatigue.

He thought longingly of bed, yawned involuntarily, and, reaching his door, fumbled the key in a most unprofessional way; there were weights upon his eyelids, a heaviness in his brain.

But the key met with no resistance from the wards, and in a trice, appreciating this fact, Lanyard was wide awake again.

No question but that he had locked the room securely on leaving after his adventure with the charming somnambulist.

Had she, then, contracted the habit?

Or was this only proof of what he had anticipated in the beginning—a bit of sleuthing on the part of Roddy? He entertained little doubt as to the correctness of this latter surmise as he threw the door open and stepped into the room, his first action being to grasp the electric switch. But no light answered.

"Hello!" he exclaimed softly, remembering that the light could readily have been turned off at the bulbs.

"What's the good of that?"

In the same breath he started violently and swung about.

The door had closed behind him, swiftly but gently, eclipsing the faint light from the hall, leaving stark darkness.

His first impression was that the intruder—Roddy, or whoever it might be—had darted past him and out, pulling the door to in the act.

Before he could consciously revise this misconception he was fighting for his life.

So unexpected, so swift and sudden fell the assault that he was caught completely off guard—between the shutting of the door and an onslaught whose violence sent him reeling to the wall, the flight of time could have been measured by the flickering of an eyelash.

Two powerful arms were round his body, pinioning his hands to his sides, his feet were tripped from under him, and he was thrown with a force that fairly jarred his teeth.

For a breath he lay dazed, struggling feebly; not long, but long enough to enable his antagonist to shift his hold and climb on top of his body, where he squatted, bearing down heavily with a knee on either of Lanyard's forearms, two hands encircling his neck, murderous thumbs digging into his windpipe.

He revived momentarily, pulled himself together, and heaved mightily in a futile effort to unseat the other.

The sole result of this was tightening pressure on his throat.

The pain grew agonizing; Lanyard's breath was almost completely shut off; he gasped vainly; his eyeballs started; a myriad lights danced blindingly before him; in his ears there rang a roaring like the beat of heavy surf upon a rock-bound coast.

Then of a sudden he ceased to struggle and lay slack and passive in the other's hands.

Only an instant longer was the clutch on his throat maintained. Both hands left it quickly, one shifting to his head to turn and press it roughly, cheek to the floor. Simultaneously he was aware of the other hand fumbling about his neck, and then of a touch of metal and the sting of a needle driven into the flesh beneath his ear.

That galvanized him; he came to life again in a twinkling, animate with threefold strength and cunning. The man on his chest was thrown off as by a young earthquake, and Lanyard's right arm was no sooner free than it shot out with blind but deadly accuracy to the point of his assailant's jaw. A click of teeth was followed by a sickish grunt as the man lurched over.

And then Lanyard was scrambling to his feet, a bit giddy, perhaps, but still sufficiently master of his wits to whip his pistol out before making one further move.

## CHAPTER XI.

## Turn About.

Lanyard now thought of his pocket flash-lamp, and immediately its wide circle of light enveloped his antagonist.

The fellow was resting on a shoulder, legs uncouthly sprawl, quite without movement of any perceptible sort; his face more than half turned to the floor, and masked into the bargain.

Incredulously Lanyard stirred the body with a foot, holding his weapon poised as though half expecting the form to quicken with instant and violent action; but it responded in no way.

With a nod of satisfaction he shifted the light until it marked the near-

est electric bulb, which proved, in line with his inference, to have been



"Mr. Smith!"

extinguished by the socket key rather than by the wall switch while the heat of the bulb indicated that the current had been shut off only an instant before his entrance.

The light full up, he went back to the thug, knelt, and, lifting the body, turned it upon its back.

Recognition immediately rewarded this maneuver: the masked face upturned to the glare was that of the American who had made a fourth in the concert of the Pack—"Mr. Smith."

Quickly unlatching the mask, Lanyard removed it, but the countenance thus exposed told little more than he knew; he could have sworn he had never seen it before. None the less, something in its saturnine cast persistently troubled his memory with the same provoking and baffling effect that had attended their first encounter.

Already the American was struggling toward consciousness. His lips and eyelids twitched spasmodically, he shuddered, and his flexed muscles began to relax. In this process something fell from between the fingers of his right hand—something small and silver-bright that caught Lanyard's eye.

Picking it up, he examined with interest a small hypodermic syringe, loaded to the full capacity, plunger drawn back—all ready for instant use.

Was the needle of this instrument that had pricked the skin of Lanyard's neck; beyond reasonable doubt it contained a soporific, if not exactly a killing dose of some narcotic drug—cocaine, at a venture.

So it appeared that this agent of the Pack had been commissioned to put the Lone Wolf to sleep for an hour or two, or, perhaps, not permanently, but long enough for their purposes.

Lanyard smiled grimly, fingering the hypodermic and crying the prostrate man.

"Turn about," he reflected, "is said to be fair play. Well, why not?"

With this he bent forward, dug the needle into the wrist of the American, and shot the plunger home, all in a single movement so swift and deft that the drug was delivered before the pain could startle the victim from his coma.

As for that, he recovered quickly enough; but only to have his clearing senses met and dashed by the muzzle of a pistol stamping a cold ring upon his temple.

"Lie perfectly quiet, my dear Mr. Smith," Lanyard advised; "don't speak above a whisper. Give the dope a chance; it'll only wait a moment—or I'm no judge and you're a careless highbinder!"

But the drug was taking swift effect; the look of panic which had drawn and flickered from his eyes, with dawning appreciation of his plight, was of daze and stupor. The eyelids fluttered and lay still; the lips moved as if with urgent desire to speak, but were dumb; a long, convulsive sigh shook the American's body, and he rested with the immobility of the dead, but for the slow and steady rise and fall of his bosom.

Thoughtfully Lanyard reviewed these phenomena.

"Must kick like a mule, that dope!" he reflected. "Lucky it didn't get me before I guessed what was up! If I'd suspected its strength, however, I'd have been less hasty—I could do with a little information from Mr. Mysterious Stranger here!"

Suddenly conscious of his dry and burning throat, he rose, and going to the washstand, drank deep and thirstily from a water-bottle, then set himself resolutely to repair the disarray of his wits and consider what was best to be done.

In abstraction he wandered to a chair over whose back hung a light dressing gown of wine-colored silk, which, because it would pack in small compass, he was in the habit of carrying with him on his travels. Lanyard had left this thrown across the bed, and he was wondering subconsciously what use the other man had thought to make of it that he should have taken the trouble to remove it to the chair.

But even as he laid hold of it he dropped the garment in sheer surprise to find it damp and heavy in his grasp, sodden with viscid moisture. And when, in a swift flash of intuition, he examined his fingers, he discovered thereon a faint discoloration—a red-dish stain.

Had the dye run? And why had the American come to dabble the thing in water?

Then the shape of an object on the floor near his feet arrested Lanyard's questioning vision. He stared, incred-

ulous, moved forward, bent over, and picked it up, clipping it gingerly between his fingers.

It was one of his razors—a heavy, hollow-ground blade—and it was foul with blood.

With a low cry, suddenly smitten with understanding, Lanyard wheeled and stared fearfully at the door communicating with Roddy's room.

It stood ajar, an inch or so, its splintered lock accounted for by a small but extremely efficient steel jimmy which lay near the threshold.

Beyond the door—darkness—silence. Mustering all his courage, the adventurer strode determinedly into the adjoining room.

The first flash of his hand-lamp discovered to him sickening justification for his apprehensions.

After a moment he returned, shut the door, and set his back against it, as if to bar out that reeking shambles.

He was very pale, his face drawn with horror, and he was shaken with nausea.

Now he knew why his dressing gown had been requisitioned—to protect a butcher's clothing.

The plot was damnably patent—Roddy, somehow a menace to the Pack, required elimination; not only had his murder been decreed, but the blame for it should be laid at Lanyard's door. Hence the attempt to drug him that he might not escape before the police could be sent to find him there.

Lanyard could no longer doubt that De Morbihan had been left behind at the Circle of Friends of Harmony solely to detain him, afford Smith time to finish his hideous job, and set the trap for the second victim.

And the plot had succeeded despite its partial failure, despite the swift reverse chance and Lanyard's cunning had meted out to the Pack's agent. In was his dressing gown that was saturated with Roddy's blood, just as those were his gloves, pilfered from his luggage, which had measurably protected the killer's hands, and which Lanyard had found in the next room, stripped hastily off and thrown to the floor, twin crumpled wads of blood-stained chambray skin.

He had now little choice; he must either flee Paris and rely on his wits to save him, or else seek De Morbihan and trust to his protection, to his influence in high quarters.

But to give himself into the hands, to become an associate of one who could be party to so cowardly a crime as this—Lanyard told himself he would sooner pay the guillotine the penalty.

Consulting his watch, he found the hour to be no later than half past four, so swiftly—truly treading upon one another's heels—events had moved since the adventure of the somnambulist.

This left at his disposition a fair two hours more of darkness—November nights are long and black in Paris; it would hardly be even moderately light before seven o'clock. But that was a respite none too long for Lanyard's necessity—he must think swiftly in contemplation of instant action were he to extricate himself without the Pack's knowledge and consent.

Granted, then, that he must fly this morning's field of Paris? But how? De Morbihan had promised that Popinot's creatures would guard every outlet; and Lanyard didn't doubt him. An attempt to escape the city by any normal channel would be to invite one of those fatally expeditious forms of assassination of which the Apaches are past masters.

He must and would find another way; but his decision was frightfully hampered by lack of ready money, the few odd francs in his pocket were no store for the war chest demanded by this emergency.

True, he had the Omber jewels; but they were not negotiable—not, at least, in Paris.

And the Buysman plan?

He pondered briefly the possibilities of the Buysman plans.

In his fretting, pacing softly to and fro, at each turn he passed his dressing table, and, chancing once to observe himself in the mirror, he stopped short, thunderstruck by something he thought to detect in that counterfeit presentation of his countenance, heavy with fatigue as it was, and haggard with contemplation of this appalling contretemps.

And instantly he was back beside the American, studying narrowly the contours of that livid mask. Here, then, was that resemblance that he saw it he could not deny that it was unfatteringly close—feature for feature the face of the murderer reproduced his face; coarsened, perhaps, but recognizably a replica of that Michael Lanyard who confronted him every morning in his shaving glass, almost the only difference residing in the scrubby black mustache that shadowed the American's upper lip.

After all, nothing wonderful in this; Lanyard's type was not uncommon; he would never have thought himself a distinguished figure.

Before rising he turned out the pockets of this casual double. But this profited him little—quite evidently the assassin had dressed for action, with forethought to evade recognition in event of accident. Lanyard collected only a cheap American watch in a "rolled-gold" case, of a sort manufactured by wholesale, a common key that might fit any hotel door, a broken paper of Regie cigarettes, an automatic pistol, a few francs in silver—nothing whatever that would serve as a mark of identification; for, though the gray lounge suit was tailor made, the tailor's labels had been ripped out of its pockets, while the man's linen and underwear alike lacked even a laundry's hieroglyphic.

With this harvest of nothing for his pains Lanyard turned again to the washstand and his shaving kit, mixed a stiff lather, stropped another razor to the finest edge he could manage, fetched a pair of keen scissors from his dressing case, and went back to the murderer.

He worked rapidly, at a high pitch of excitement—as much through sheer desperation as through any appeal in-

herent in his scheme, either to his common sense or to his romantic bent.

In two minutes he had stripped the mustache clean away from that stupid, faccid mask.

Unquestionably the resemblance was now most striking; the American would readily pass for Michael Lanyard.

This much accomplished, he pursued his preparations in feverish haste. In spite of this, he overlooked no detail. In less than twenty minutes he had exchanged clothing with the American down to shirt, collar and necktie; had packed in his own pockets the several articles taken from the other, together with the jointed jimmy and a few of his personal effects, and was ready to bid adieu to himself, to that Michael Lanyard whom Paris knew.

The insistent masquerade on the floor had called himself "Goodenough Smith," he must serve now as "Goodenough Lanyard," at least for the Lone Wolf's purposes; the police, at all events, would accept him as such. And if the memory of Michael Lanyard must needs wear the stigma of brutal murder, he need not repine in his oblivion, since through this perfunctory decease the Lone Wolf would gain freedom even greater than before.

The Pack had contrived only to eliminate Michael Lanyard, the amateur of fine paintings; remained the Lone Wolf with not one faculty impaired, but rather with a deadlier purpose to shape his occult courses.

Under the influence of his methodical preparations his emotions had cooled appreciably, taking a cast of cold, malignant vengeance.

He, who never in all his criminal record had so much as pulled trigger in self-defense, was ready now to shoot to kill with the most cold-blooded intent—given one of three targets; while for Popinot's creatures, if they worried him, he meant to exterminate them with as little compunction as though they were the rats in fact that they were in spirit.

Extinguishing the lights, he stepped quickly to a window and from one edge of its shade looked down into the street.

He was in time to see a stunted human silhouette detach itself from the shadow of a doorway on the opposite walk, move to the curb and wave an arm—evidently signaling another sentinel on a farther corner and out of Lanyard's range of vision.

Herein was additional proof, if any lacked, that De Morbihan had not exaggerated the disposition of Popinot. This animal in the street, momentarily revealed by the corner light as he darted across to take position by the door, this animal with sickly face and pointed chin, with dirty muffer round his chicken-neck, shoddy coat clothing its sloping shoulders, baggy corduroy trousers flapping round its bony shanks—this was Popinot's, and but one of a thousand differing in no essential save degree of viciousness.

It wasn't possible to guess how thoroughly Popinot had picketed the house, in co-operation with Roddy's murderer, by way of provision against mischance; but the adventurer was satisfied that, in his proper guise as himself, he needed only to open that postern door at the street end of the passage to feel a knife slip in between his ribs—most probably in his back, beneath the shoulderblade.

He nodded grimly, moved back from the window, and used the flash-lamp to light